

How do I find all files containing specific text on Linux?

Asked 7 years, 9 months ago

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I'm trying to find a way to scan my entire Linux system for all files containing a specific string of text. Just to clarify, I'm looking for text within the file, not in the file name.

When I was looking up how to do this, I came across this solution twice:

```
find / -type f -exec grep -H 'text-to-find-here' {} \;
```

However, it doesn't work. It seems to display every single file in the system.

Is this close to the proper way to do it? If not, how should I? This ability to find text strings in files would be extraordinarily useful for some programming projects I'm doing.

linux text grep directory find

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edited May 21 '17 at 11:40



Peter Mortensen

27.8k 21 94 123

asked Jun 6 '13 at 8:06



Nathan

64.2k 10 32 47

29 remember that grep will interpret any . as a single-character wildcard, among others. My advice is to alway use either fgrep or egrep. – Walter Tross Oct 28 '13 at 11:54

12 anyway, you were almost there! Just replace -H with -l (and maybe grep with fgrep). To exclude files with certain patterns of names you would use find in a more advanced way. It's worthwhile to learn to use find , though. Just man find . – Walter Tross Oct 28 '13 at 12:01

7 find ... -exec <cmd> + is easier to type and faster than find ... -exec <cmd> \; . It works only if <cmd> accepts any number of file name arguments. The saving in execution time is especially big if <cmd> is slow to start like Python or Ruby scripts. – hagello Jan 28 '16 at 5:16

To search non-recursively in a given path the command is `grep --include=*.txt -snw "pattern" thepath/*.` – Stéphane Laurent Aug 15 '16 at 12:34

@StéphaneLaurent I think you are complicating it too much. Just say grep "pattern" path/*.txt – fedorqui 'SO stop harming' Dec 2 '16 at 13:13

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```
grep -rnw '/path/to/somewhere/' -e 'pattern'
```

- `-r` or `-R` is recursive,
- `-n` is line number, and
- `-w` stands for match the whole word.
- `-l` (lower-case L) can be added to just give the file name of matching files.
- `-e` is the pattern used during the search

Along with these, `--exclude`, `--include`, `--exclude-dir` flags could be used for efficient searching:

- This will only search through those files which have `.c` or `.h` extensions:

```
grep --include=*.{c,h} -rnw '/path/to/somewhere/' -e "pattern"
```

- This will exclude searching all the files ending with `.o` extension:

```
grep --exclude=*.o -rnw '/path/to/somewhere/' -e "pattern"
```

- For directories it's possible to exclude one or more directories using the `--exclude-dir` parameter. For example, this will exclude the dirs `dir1/`, `dir2/` and all of them matching `*.dst/`:

```
grep --exclude-dir={dir1,dir2,*.dst} -rnw '/path/to/somewhere/' -e "pattern"
```

This works very well for me, to achieve almost the same purpose like yours.

For more options check `man grep`.

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edited Jan 26 at 21:27

answered Jun 6 '13 at 8:21



Intrastellar Explorer

758 2 12 42



rakib_

111k 3 14 25

80 use `--exclude`. like `"grep -rnw --exclude=*.o 'directory' -e "pattern"` – rakib_ Jun 6 '13 at 8:29

131 it's worth noting: it seems the `r` option is lazy (traverses depth-first, then stops after the first directory), while `R` is greedy (will traverse the entire tree correctly). – Eliran Malka Mar 24 '15 at 15:09

6 `grep -rnw "String I was looking for"` done what I needed. Thanks! – ViliusK Aug 19 '15 at 21:20

39 Note(especially for newbies): The quotation marks in the above command are important. – madD7 Dec 22 '15 at 12:37


79 @Eliran Malka `R` en `r` will both traverse directories correctly, but `R` will follow symbolic links. – bzeaman Jul 5 '16 at 8:36

```
grep -Ril "text-to-find-here" /
```



- answered Jun 6 '13 at 8:08



22 You can replace / with path to directory `grep -Ril "text-to-find-here" ~/sites/` or use . for current directory `grep -Ril "text-to-find-here" .` – [Black](#) Jan 28 '16 at 12:19 



Just do:



You can also use [regular expressions](#), specify the filetype, etc.

answered Jun 6 '13 at 8:26



44 `only` or `only ever` has nice highlights, but `fixed` even when properly used is much better in performance.